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ABSTRACT

To explore ways to improve reading instruction, a study examined the relation of discussions about assigned reading to students' critical reading behavior and investigated the efficacy of coaching teachers on techniques for discussing the readings they assign. Five teachers from a rural Georgia high school, and their classes of 25 students each were videotaped as they used classroom texts, related study guides, and worksheets, and discussed the readings. Data analysis included transcribing the videotapes, coding the transcripts, and inspecting the data obtained. Results indicated that discussions were test-like events that served to cover the text content, but very few students participated actively in discussion and the central participant was the teacher. Teachers rarely presented themselves as collaborators in the exploration of the content or admitted they did not know something. Coaching increased teachers' acknowledgement of students' responses, increased elaborate student responses, and decreased the number of response resignations. For three teachers, coaching increased the proportion of text connected talk, and the talk became more inferential and analytical. Little progress was made in fostering reference to other texts or hypothesizing and reasoning through divergent possibilities suggested by the text. A table of structural functions and text references in discussion and a segment of a coded transcript are included. (SRT)

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# Video Assisted Coaching of Textbook Discussion Skills: Its Impact on Critical Reading Behavior

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# Video Assisted Coaching of Textbook Discussion Skills: Its Impact on Critical Reading Behaviors

Nationwide assessments of reading achievement in American schools consistently find that very few students learn to interpret critically what they read (Reading, thinking, and writing, 1981; Three National Assessments, 1981; The reading report card, 1985). This general lack of critical reading ability is believed to be linked to teachers' lack of skill in leading discussions about assigned reading. Currently, however, little is known about the relation of classroom discussion to students' reading achievement. It was toward the end of improving instruction that fosters critical reading development that we set out first, to explore the relation of discussions about assigned reading to students' critical reading behavior and, second, to investigate the efficacy of coaching teachers on techniques for discussing the reading they assign.

## Method

### Study Site and Participants

The study site was a rural high school in central Georgia. According to the district's census information, the schools is representative of high schools in the rural Southeast. Five teachers and their respective classes of approximately 25 students each participated in the project.

Participation was voluntary, although the principal encouraged certain teachers to volunteer.

Materials/Equipment

Classroom texts and related study guides, worksheets, and other resources normally used by the teacher and students were the only instructional materials used in this study. The video equipment used to record teacher-student interactions during discussions of content area reading assignments included a Panasonic videorecorder and a camera with a wide-angle lens positioned on a high tripod in one corner of the classroom.

Procedure

Since it was the purpose of the study to investigate the feasibility of improving instruction in critical reading through a collaborative research effort, the approach taken adhered to a supervisory process which limits the focus of evaluation to specific teaching behaviors agreed upon by both the researcher/supervisor and the teacher. Within this supervisory approach, we examined teachers' and researchers' perceptions of teacher-student interaction patterns over time. The structure of our observations followed the five-step supervision process described by Goldhammer (1969) and Cogan (1972). Briefly, this process consisted of 1) a preobservation conference in which the teacher and the supervisor/investigator decided on the purpose of the forthcoming observation; 2) the observation in which the videorecorded information was supplemented by the

supervisor/ investigator's field notes; 3) the analysis of the observation in which the supervisor/investigator developed strategies for coaching (see Joyce & Showers, 1980) the teacher on how to improve performance in holding critical discussions over assigned readings; 4) the postobservation conference in which the supervisor and teacher mutually planned a future lesson that incorporated the agreed-upon changes; and 5) the postconference analysis in which the supervisor/ experimenter analyzed his/her own performance in working with the teacher.

This process was repeated over the school year beginning in late September of 1984. Initially, two week intervals between planning a lesson and actually taping it allowed the teacher practice time. By mid-year, the intervals between observations were 3-4 weeks. In total, ten observations per class were made.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out in three steps: (1) transcribing the videotapes, (2) coding the transcripts, and (3) inspecting the data obtained. The transcription and coding steps commenced immediately following the first videotaped session. Complete transcripts were made of each videotape. Transcribers used tape indexes and investigators' field notes to provide contextual information. The transcripts were analyzed with a coding system derived by the investigators from procedures used in previous research in sociolinguistics (Cherry, 1978), in

educational anthropology (Philips, 1983), and in education (Purves and Rippere, 1968; Reading, Writing, and Thinking, 1981; Three National Assessments in Reading, 1981). The coding system provided for identifying the functions of elicitation-response patterns that give structure to the discussion as well as for identifying qualities of the discussion's content that are associated with critical reading behavior (see Table 1).

## General Observations

Discussions were test-like events which served to cover the text content. Initially the most common discussion pattern was for the teacher to ask simple, factual questions about the content, a student responded with a simple one- or two-word reply, the teacher moved on to ask another factual question, and so on. An expanded version of this pattern was to ask students questions to set up a brief lecture ranging from three to five minutes. There was little straying from the text and digressing into irrelevancies (except in the case of one of the teachers).

Very few students participated actively in discussion. Seldom did more than three or four students contribute significantly to the discussion. Among these, one or two served as the teacher's audience reference. The central participant in discussion was the teacher, and the focus seldom shifted to students. Only rarely did students address one another or hold an exchange with one another. Occasionally two or three students spoke in succession, but

not in response to one another. Rather than elaborate upon a previous speaker's comment, students waited in line to give their own answers to the teachers questions.

Teachers used certain discussion devices to assert authority and maintain control, specifically the devices of explicit elicitation and acknowledgement of expected responses. Teachers' acknowledgement of students' contributions served not to incorporate those contributions into the discussion, but as a way of keeping students listening while they controlled the floor.

Rarely did teachers present themselves as learners or as collaborators in the exploration of the content. There was no indication that teachers ever learned anything with students, nor was there any expression of having gained insights from discussions with students. Teachers occasionally faked knowledge of the material they were teaching, rarely offering the admission, "I don't know."

To some extent coaching appears to have altered the structural aspects of the discussion. In general there was an increase in teachers' expanded acknowledgment of students' responses, an increase in elaborated responses by students, and a diminution in response resignations. In the case of one classroom there was a radical shift in student talk toward asking questions.

For three teachers, coaching appeared to result in altering the quality of the text references made in discussion. In all three of these cases there was an

increase in the proportion of text connected talk, and the talk became increasingly inferential and analytical. Little progress was made in fostering reference to other texts or hypothesizing and reasoning through divergent possibilities suggested by the text.

Table 1

Structural Functions and Text References in Discussion

| Code | Structural Functions |
|---|---|
| | Elicitation. A request for information, usually by the teacher. A complete correct response is expected. |
| LX | Explicit elicitation. An interrogative specifying the kind of information requested by the use of wh words: what, which, why, how, who, and where. |
| LI | Inexplicit elicitation. A request for information containing a vocative standing alone, e.g., a person's name. |
| LOX | Overexplicit elicitation. A request for information that uses declarative, imperative, or interrogative expressions to focus on the acts involved in responding, e.g., "Give me one example . . ." |
| | Response. An answer to a request for information. |
| RR | Response resignation. An expression of inability to give complete and correct answer. |
| RS | Simple response. An affirmative, negative, or list-like response given in few words. |
| RE | Elaborated response. An answer developed beyond simple affirmative, negative, or list items. |
| | Ratification. Giving evidence of having heard and incorporating it into the discussion. |
| AD | Direct ratification. Explicit acknowledgement of a speaker's response. |
| AR | Incorporation. Ellipsis and substitution of pronouns for a speaker's unit of speech. |
| AE | Expansion. Developing or fulfilling out a speaker's response. |
| AR | Repetition. Repeating all or part of a speaker's response. |
| | No Ratification. Failure to hear or incorporate a speaker's response into the discussion. |
| 0N | Rejection. A direct statement of a response's unacceptability. |
| 0C | Progression. Giving a correct answer when there is no response or the speaker's response is incorrect. |
| 0L | Repetition. Repeating one's own utterance when there is no response from the person addressed. |

| Code | References to Text |
|---|---|
| | **Personal Reference** |
| p | Personal comment. Statements about oneself that are tangentially related to the text. |
| pan | Personal analysis. Text-based statements about oneself that are linked to specific aspects of the text. |
| | Affective attribution. Statements that attribute feelings or emotions to the text. |
| | **Limited Text Reference** |
| l | Retelling. A summary or citation of specific content of a text. |
| i | Inference. A text-based statement about possibilities beyond that which is explicitly stated in the text. |
| g | Generalization. Statement of general meaning or conclusion drawn from the text. |
| ans | Superficial analysis. Statements about surface aspects of the text such as its format, length, etc. |
| ane | Elaborated analysis. Substantive statements about the content and meaning affecting features of the text. |
| | **Other-Text References** |
| owg | Reference to other texts in general. Statements that classify, place, or compare the text to other literature. |
| ows | Reference to other specific texts. Statements that compare or contrast the text content to other texts that are named. |
| owe | Evaluation. Judgments about the worth of a particular text compared to other texts. |

Figure 1

Segment of a Coded Transcript

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| LXi | Twain: | Not only did he feel like he was Mercutio's friend but he felt like he did what? |
| RSi | Andrew: | Caused the death. |
| AR;LXi;LXrv | Twain: | Caused the death. You think so? Find what he said just before he thought so. |
| RSrnt;tv | Andrew: | "Oh I am fortunes fool" (page 310) Hah! Ahh! (some laughter; everyone begins to look through books. |
| RSrnt,tv | Derry: | "Courage man" (reads line, page 309) |
| ØN | Twain: | No! (Everyone continues looking.) |
| RSrnt,tv | Derry: | Oh here go. "This Gentlemen (page 310) ah, the prince's...(cut off) |
| RR | Tamala: | What you want us to find - (exasperated) |
| RRans | Jenniffer: | What line we looking up? |
| ØL;tv | Twain: | What Mercutio - what Romeo says before he decides to fight Tybalt. |
| REnt,tv | Andrew: | "Alive, in triumph - and Mercutio slain . . (page 310) . . . respectively (cut off) |
| LXl | Twain: | What's that mean? |
| RRans | ?S | Where you at? |
| RSans | Twain: | He ah- around Line 110 - that ah passage 310. |
| REl | Derry: | He's sayin', he's sayin, 'bout how Mercutio soul was just going up to heaven and he saying |

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